DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 367 470 PS 022 107

AUTHOR Zimmerman, Elaine
TITLE Parents as Leaders for Children and Policy.
PUB DATE 30 Nov 93
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Child Care Conference (Washington, DC, November 30, 1993).
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Day Care; *Early Childhood Education; Educational Policy; Government Role; Leadership Responsibility; Leadership Training; Parent Attitudes; *Parent Education; *Parent Participation; *Parent Role; Parents as Teachers; Parent School Relationship; *Public Policy; State Programs

ABSTRACT

To be truly effective, early childhood educational and day care policy must reflect the perceptions, views, and concerns of parents. Because parents are their children's primary teachers, there is a high correlation between parent involvement and their children's academic achievement, and a constituency of the family would make a significant difference in public policy. Early childhood education leaders need to: (1) listen to parents; (2) provide family supports for meetings; (3) use everyday language, not educational jargon; (4) link parent participation to real change and real power to policy; (5) talk to, not at, parents; (6) develop environments that value values; (7) offer skills building to parents, not just parent education; (8) develop new messengers, such as art and music, to reach parents; (9) take into account the value of the parents' religious beliefs; (10) use parent mentors; (11) allow for the psyche; (12) encourage fathers' involvement in the education of their children; (13) recognize that parents are more important than service providers; and (14) let parents define goals for action, skills development, and leadership. State policies should withhold funding to educational programs that do not include parent participation at some level, involve parents in leadership training, and design teacher education courses about parents. (MDM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 367 470

PARENTS AS LEADERS FOR CHILDREN AND POLICY

Elaine Zimmerman

11/30/93
Child Care Conference
Dept of Health and Human Services
Washington, DC

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Elaine Zimmerman
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

OUR FAMILIES ARE THE HEART OF OUR COMMUNITIES. IT IS WHERE WE NURTURE OUR YOUNG, AND PROVIDE THEM WITH MOTIVATION AND MORALS. IT IS THE KEY PLACE FOR LOVE, SUSTENANCE AND REST FOR ALL OF US. IT IS FREQUENTLY THE PLACE OUR OWN PARENTS RETURN TO IN THEIR LATER YEARS.

THESE FUNCTIONS OF THE FAMILY WILL ENDURE, THOUGH THE STRUCTURE OF THE FAMILY IS RAPIDLY CHANGING. THE NEXT GENERATION OF CHILDREN WILL BE LAUNCHED WITH PROPER MOMENTUM. THE QUESTION IS WHERE THEY WILL LAND.

PARENTS ARE WORRIED. THEY ARE WORRIED ABOUT WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF THEIR CHILDREN WHILE THEY WORK. THEY WORRY OVER LOST TIME, MISSED OPPORTUNITIES WITH THEIR KIDS, WORKING ONE, TWO AND SOMETIMES THREE SHIFTS JUST TO MAKE A DECENT FAMILY WAGE.

PS 022102

THEY KNOW THE NEW ECONOMY DEMANDS NEW SKILLS OF THEIR KIDS, BUT THEY FEAR THAT THEIR KIDS WILL NOT HAVE A FAIR CHANCE IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS. THEY KNOW THAT GANGS CAN COMPETE WITH THE FAMILY FOR CHILDREN. THEY KNOW THAT IN SOME NEIGHBORHOODS BEING OUTSIDE IS TANTAMOUNT TO BULLET FIRE.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

IN A RECENT PARENT DISCUSSION GROUP WITH WORKING CLASS PARENTS, WHEN THE GROUP BECAME SAFE, A CONFESSIONAL BEGAN. IT WAS LIKE FROGS COMING OUT OF WATER. THE CONFESSIONS WERE NOT ABOUT HITTING TWO YEAR OLDS. THEY WERE ABOUT LEAVING THEIR KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADERS ALONE BECAUSE THEY HAD NO PLACE TO PUT THEM BEFORE THEY LEFT FOR WORK. THEY HAD CODES WITH THESE KIDS BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT CLOSE TO THEIR NEIGHBORS AND THEY HAD NO FAMILY TO LEAVE THEIR KIDS WITH BEFORE SCHOOL BEGAN. NOT ONE PARENT SAW THIS AS A LACK OF FAMILY POLICY BUT AS A PERSONAL FAULT.

IN RECENT INTERVIEWS FOR A PARENT LEADERSHIP COURSE IN HARTFORD, ALMOST EVERY PARENT INTERVIEWED TALKED ABOUT HOW THEY WOULD MAKE SURE THE SCHOOLS DID NOT HARM THEIR CHILDREN. NEARLY 30 OF THE 40 PARENTS INTERVIEWED SAW THE SCHOOLS HURTING THEIR CHILDREN'S SELF IMAGE. THESE PARENTS WERE ALL PARENTS OF COLOR. IT DOES NOT MATTER IS THERE ARE HIGH QUALITY TEACHERS IN HARTFORD. OF COURSE THERE ARE SOME. WHAT DOES MATTER IS THE PERCEPTION OF PARENTS, PARTICULARLY A SHARED PERCEPTION AMONG PARENTS THAT DID NOT KNOW EACH OTHER.

IN AN URBAN SECTOR WHEN KIDS WERE ASKED HOW MANY KNEW SOMEONE WHO DEALT DRUGS 25% RAISED THEIR HANDS. WHEN ASKED HOW MANY KNOW SOMEONE WHO DIED, 25% RAISED THEIR HANDS. WHEN ASKED HOW MANY KNOW SOMEONE WHO BROUGHT GUNS TO SCHOOL, 40% RAISED THEIR HANDS. A RECENT STUDY IN AN URBAN CONTINUITY CLINIC CITES 7% OF THE CHILDREN UNDER SIX YEARS OF AGE WITNESSING A SHOOTING OR A STABBING.

PARENTS ARE WORRIED. IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY AS LEADERS IN EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION TO REACH PARENTS AND TO HELP THEM REACH US.

CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY WITHOUT THE FAMILY BEHIND IT, WITHOUT A WHOLE NEIGHBORHOOD BEHIND IT, IS LIKE A FAMILY WITHOUT GENERATIONS, SOMETIMES ONE-SIDED, LONELY AND NOT AS EFFICIENT.

IN PLANNING OUR KIDS COUNT SCHOOL READINESS CAMPAIGN, WE SPENT TWO YEARS TALKING TO PARENTS IN THE CITY, SUBURB AND RURAL SECTORS. WE SPOKE TO GRANDPARENTS AS WE BECAME AWARE OF HOW MANY CHILDREN WERE BEING RAISED BY THE ELDERLY. ONE FINDING WAS SURPRISING. PARENTS DID NOT HAVE EITHER THE TOOLS NOR THE SENSE OF ENTITLEMENT FOR CHANGE, ACROSS RACE, CLASS AND REGION OF THE STATE. THEY WERE STYMIED AT POINTS OF ACTION. THEY DO NOT SEE PARENTS AS A CONSTITUENCY OR A POWER BASE. THEY WERE ISOLATED LIKE PARENTS ON THE FRONTIER, BUT WITHOUT A SENSE OF PROMISE.

WE MUST CHANGE THIS RAPIDLY FOR TWO REASONS. 1. PARENTS ARE THE HIDDEN AND PRIMARY CURRICULUM FOR CHILDREN. THERE IS A HIGH CORRELATION BETWEEN PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN A CHILD'S LEARNING AND THAT CHILD'S SUCCESS. 2. A CONSTITUENCY ON THE FAMILY WOULD MAKE A SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN PUBLIC POLICY, PARTICULARLY UNDER CLINTON.

SOME TIPS THAT HAVE BEEN HELPFUL IN OUR WORK:

1. LISTEN TO PARENTS. BASE AGENDAS ON PARENT-DEFINED NEED AND LANGUAGE.

2. PROVIDE FAMILY SUPPORTS FOR MEETINGS. OFFER A PIZZA AND CHILD CARE. YOU'LL GET THE PARENTS THERE.

3. TALK NORMAL. DON'T USE PHRASES LIKE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT OR DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE PRACTICES. THESE ARE POIGNANT PHRASES TO US, BUT NOT TO PARENTS.

4. LINK PARTICIPATION TO REAL CHANGE AND REAL POWER TO POLICY, PROGRAM, MEDIA. ETC PARENTS KNOW IF IT IS NOT REAL AND THEY WILL LEAVE. THEY WORK WITH POWER EVERY DAY, AT WORK, JOB TRAINING AND AT HOME.

5. ACKNOWLEDGE THAT WE ARE ALL PARENTS. ENTER CONVERSATIONS BASED ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES, NOT IN A ONE-UP POSITION.

6. DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTS THAT VALUE VALUES. MASS MUTUAL'S STUDY FOUND THAT FAMILY VALUES MEANT SHARING, RESPONSIBILITY, CARING FOR ONE ANOTHER. FAMILY VALUES ARE CRITICAL TO PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT. PARENTS CARE DEEPLY ABOUT THE DECLINE OF THE SOCIAL CONTRACT. THEY WANT VISION AND ROOTS FOR THEIR KIDS.

7. OFFER SKILLS BUILDING, NOT JUST PARENT EDUCATION WHICH CAN BE SO CONDESCENDING AND IS UNDERSTOOD AS CONDESCENDING. PARENT LEADERSHIP INFERS CONSTITUENCY DEVELOPMENT AND CONNOTES CHANGE. (I HAVE PACKETS HERE WITH CURRICULUM ON HOME LEARNING ACTIVITIES WHERE PARENTS LEARN HOW TO TEACH THEIR CHILDREN - HIGH SUCCESS HERE EVEN BETTER THAN PARENTS IN THE SCHOOLS.)

8. DEVELOP NEW MESSENGERS - UPBEAT, PROUD, DIGNIFIED, THAT ARE NOT PROGRAM OR SOCIAL SERVICE DRIVEN. UTILIZE ART AND LIFE FORCE IMAGES-NOT JUST SERVICE LANGUAGE. (MENTION THE UNITED WAY)

(I'LL PLAY YOU SUCH A SONG IN A FEW MINUTES)

9. DON'T BE AFRAID OF RELIGION. GOD IS THE BOUGH ON WHICH MANY PARENTS HOLD ON FOR DEAR LIFE. RELIGION CAN BE A BASE FROM WHICH ORGANIZING CAN TAKE PLACE. RELIGION CAN TEACH LEADERSHIP SKILLS.

10. CREATE A PYRAMID WHEN YOU CAN. HAVE PARENT MENTOR PARENTS OR REACH OUT TO NEW PARENTS.

11. ALLOW FOR THE PSYCHE. FAMILY IS A ROSCHARDT TEST. EVERYONE'S DEEPEST FEELINGS ABOUND. WHY DENY IT?

WE HAVE TO ALLOW FOR ALL OF OUR AMBIVALENCES AS PARENTS AND AS WORKERS. IF WE WANT TO CREATE A SAFE COMMUNITY.

CHILD CARE WORKERS SOMETIMES RESENT PARENTS FOR WORKING AND LEAVING THE KIDS. THERE'S AN ARROGANCE THAT CAN GET MAXIMIZED DUE TO THE MARGINILIZATION OF THE FIELD AS WELL AS THE HONEST RIGHTEOUSNESS OF THE FIELD FOR SO MANY YEARS.

ON THE OTHER SIDE, PARENTS SOMETIMES RESENT THE CHILD CARE WORKERS. THEY HAVE MORE TIME WITH THE KIDS. THE CAN ACT IMPERIOUS. THEY SOMETIMES DON'T INVOLVE THE PARENTS.

12. BRING IN THE FATHERS. THERE IS AN AFRICAN STORY OF A DEAD MAN WHOSE BONES COME ALIVE ONLY WHEN THE NEWBORN SAYS, "WHERE IS MY FATHER?" HE COMES ALIVE THROUGH REMEMBRANCE.

13. DON'T CONFUSE A CONSTITUENCY OF SERVICE PROVIDERS WITH A CONSTITUENCY OF PARENTS. THEY ARE NOT THE SAME. POLITICIANS KNOW THIS. PARENTS KNOW THIS. SOMETIMES WE LIKE TO FORGET THIS PART.

14. LET PARENTS DEFINE GOALS FOR ACTION, SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND GOALS FOR LEADERSHIP. THEN, YIELD SHORT TERM SUCCESSES. CONCRETE SUCCESSES. BUT DON'T CONFUSE SMALL WITH THE LARGE PICTURE. YOU CAN FOCUS ON A SMALL SECTION OF A PAINTING IF YOU KNOW WHAT THE WHOLE CANVAS IS.

15. ALLOW FOR STORY, GENERATION, HISTORY AND DREAMS. WHERE THERE IS MEMORY, THERE IS ALSO HOPE.

NOW HOW DOES THIS TRANSLATE TO STATE POLICY? I WOULD:

A. IMPLEMENT POLICY THAT DISALLOWS FUNDING FOR STATE FUNDED PROGRAMS WITHOUT PARENT PARTICIPATION IN PROGRAM DESIGN, OR EXPANSION.

B. INVOLVE PARENTS IN LEADERSHIP TRAINING. HELP THEM SPEAK ON QUALITY CAREGIVING AND FAMILY ISSUES. SO THAT THEY CAN BE THE PROPER MESSENGERS TO OTHER PARENTS, TO THE MAYOR OR THE STATE LEGISLATURE. THIS IS NOT LOBBYING. IT IS SIMPLY PLANNING WITH PARENTS AND SHARING LANGUAGES TO REACH COMMON GOALS FOR KIDS. IT IS DEMOCRACY AT ITS BEST.

C. DESIGN COURSES FOR YOUR TEACHERS ON PARENTS. LET ME TELL YOU, MANY CAREGIVERS HAVE NO IDEAS WHY PARENTS ARE WORKING SO HARD OR ARE SO STRESSED. THEY HAVE NOT BEEN OFFERED A SOCIAL ECONOMIC ANALYSIS OF TODAY. IF YOU HAVE ONE COURSE ON CHANGING FAMILY STRUCTURE, THE NEW ECONOMY AND CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC AND IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND THOSE WHO CARE FOR THEM, EVERYONE WOULD FEEL EMPOWERED. CHILD CARE WORKERS WOULD REALIZE THEY HAVE A NEW AND PIVOTAL ROLE. PARENTS WOULD FEEL BETTER UNDERSTOOD.

D. SET UP EVALUATION TEAMS BY PARENTS EACH YEAR OF THE PROGRAM. UTILIZE THE OPPORTUNITY TO TEACH PARENTS WHAT YOU THINK THE CORE VARIABLES ARE OF A QUALITY ENVIRONMENT. BUT LISTEN TO WHAT MATTERS TO PARENTS. THEY MAY HAVE OTHER VARIABLES THAT ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT. YOU CAN BUILD A NEW PICTURE, A NEW MAP TOGETHER. IT

WILL BE BIGGER AND EASIER TO GET TO.

E. THE MOST DIFFICULT IS THE CHANGE WE MUST DO ON OURSELVES. WE MUST COME BACK TO OUR ROLES AS PARENTS. FEEL OUR OWN AMBIVALENCE IN THE WORK WE DO AND HOW IT KEEPS US FROM OUR HOME. WHAT DID IT TAKE TO COME HERE. HOW MANY OF YOU HAVE LEFT YOUR CHILDREN HOME. WHO WILL TAKE CARE OF THEM. CAN YOU ACKNOWLEDGE YOUR CHILDREN AT YOUR JOB, PARTICULARLY IF YOU ARE HIGH UP.

LET'S NOT BE ONE OF THE PICASSO PAINTINGS WITH A FACE CUT UP INTO DIFFERENT PIECES. IT IS HARD FOR EVERY ONE OF US. MYSELF INCLUDED.

IF WE HOLD ON TO THE PARENT PART OF OURSELVES, WE WILL BE BETTER ADMINISTRATORS, PLANNERS AND TEACHERS IN THIS FIELD.

THERE IS AN ODD IRONY. THE MORE WE ARE IN THE FIELD OF CHILD AND FAMILY POLICY, THE LESS NURTURING WE MAY BECOME TO OURSELVES AND OUR OWN FAMILIES, AND THE LESS SENSITIVE TO TRUE PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE WORK WE OVERSEE.

WE MUST REMEMBER WHY WE CAME INTO THIS FIELD. WE ARE THE PARENTS AND THE TEACHERS HELPING PARENTS. YEATS' LINE WAS SO STUNNING IN AMONG CHILDREN - "BODY SWAYED TO MUSIC

BRIGHTENING GLANCE

HOW CAN WE KNOW THE DANCER FROM THE DANCE?"